

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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EXTINCTION TO REMOVE FISH FROM ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST

For the first time ever, an animal is being removed from the endangered species list because it is presumed to be extinct.

The Tecopa pupfish, a 1½ inch fish native to the Amargosa River near California's Death Valley, has not been found since 1970 despite numerous attempts to locate populations of the pupfish. The subspecies is thought to have expired because human activities such as stream channelization, pollution, and the introduction of competing, non-native species have destroyed the pupfish's only known habitat.

In announcing the proposed rulemaking, required for every change in the endangered species list, Assistant Secretary Robert L. Herbst said, "The most depressing thing about this loss of life form is that it was totally avoidable. The human projects which so disrupted its habitat, if carefully planned, could have ensured its survival."

The Tecopa pupfish, one of 12 kinds of pupfishes in the Nation, could tolerate highly saline waters and temperatures up to 108 degrees. It existed in small pools and thermal springs near the town of Tecopa, California. Twenty to 30 years ago, efforts to build a hot bathhouse above a spring involved the rechanneling and combining of two spring outflows. This resulted in a swift, barren channel for which the pupfish was not adapted. Later, mosquito fish, bluegill, and crayfish which were introduced into the area competed with the pupfish for food and preyed upon juveniles.

(over)

"Once the habitat was so drastically altered, it is doubtful whether any action could have saved the fish in the wild," Herbst said, "but what is so disconcerting about the demise of the Tecopa pupfish is that its plight has been so typical of what has occurred throughout the Nation. A lack of knowledge coupled with poor and careless project planning without regard to the impact on the environment has taken a heavy toll on our wildlife resources.

"This is precisely why the Endangered Species Act of 1973 contains a provision to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account in the early planning stages of a project. When this is done, we can avoid undue harm toward wildlife while still accommodating most developmental activities. In the overwhelming majority of cases we can ensure survival of a species by making only minor modifications to a project which might have an adverse impact on the environment."

The proposed rulemaking, published in the July 3, 1978, Federal Register, also notes that the Shoshone pupfish, a closely related species from the same area, may also be extinct.

Interested persons who wish to comment on this proposal have until September 1, 1978, to do so. Comments should be addressed to the Director (OES), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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